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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the observable play behaviors of elementary school students to determine how children interact within and among cultural groups. Observations were conducted during the recess period at an urban elementary school attended by 623 boys and girls age 6 through 12. Recess periods and play areas were segregated by grade and sex. Data were collected through observations of playground behaviors and interviews of playground duty teachers. Results indicated that boys tended to engage in more rough and tumble play, whereas girls tended to engage in more passive activities such as jumping rope. Older boys tended to exclude younger boys from games they were playing, whereas older girls tended to include younger girls in their activities. Asian students kept to themselves more than any other group, often excluding non-Asians from their activities. Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites tended to mix freely and play in non-segregated groups. (MDM)

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A Descriptive Study of Multicultural Elementary Student Playground Behaviors and Their Relationship to Gender, Age, Race and Socioeconomic Status

by

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The study of play constitutes a large body of research by historians, behaviorists, psychoanalysts, linguists and anthropologists among others. Their work, reviewed collectively, echoes a common framework, namely, that the study of play is relevant and necessary for fully comprehending human development. Anthropologists have defined play as an imitation or preparation for life (Mead, 1930); a game or sports event (Raum, 1940; Henry and Henry, 1944); and voluntary, fun and childlike activities (Huizinga, 1955). Play is held to provide a foundation for understanding interpersonal and intrapersonal qualities and characteristics. The field of cultural anthropology capitalizes upon the concept of play as expressive behavior and extends the definition further by viewing play as an expressive model of culture (Roberts, Arth and Bush, 1959; Sutton-Smith and Roberts, 1970; Sutton-Smith, 1977).

Culture is often defined as shared meanings that are created, continued, changed and transmitted through social interaction (Goodenough, 1971). Because schools play a significant role in the coming together of different cultures which exist within our society, the concept of play as an expressive model of culture is well suited for research within schools. This paper focuses on observable play behaviors of how elementary students interact within and among groups on an urban school playground.

The research design is ethnographic, employing a qualitative analysis of data. Data collection procedures included the recording

of field notes taken of observable playground activities, interviewing, and transcribing audio taped interviews from adult playground supervisors. The results were analyzed within the symbolic interactionist tradition (Jacob, 1992), supporting the view that as action builds up among groups of people, so cultures develop: however, like the person, these processes are continuously undergoing change and construction. A strong emphasis is placed upon the self, interaction, and voluntarism as opposed to internal psychological drives (Woods, 1992). It is from this perspective that categories within groups of children at play are identified along with their emerging patterns. Because of the merits of this approach, Jacob (1992) reports that the symbolic interactionist tradition is firmly established as one of the main modes of qualitative inquiry in educational research.

The subjects of the study include 623 boys and girls, ages six to twelve, who attend an urban elementary school. Males and females are represented in equal number, but the racial-ethnic composition of the student population reflects diversity as do socioeconomic status indicators. Independent and interdependent categories influencing student behaviors were found to be age, gender, race and program identity. The study attempted to determine how these categories interact within and among groups of students as evidenced by their playground behaviors. Consistent with previous ethnographic findings (Borman, 1981; Downs and Reagan, 1983; Phillips, 1983; Lyons, 1984;

Pinkett and Quay, 1987; Swadener, 1987; Pelligrini, 1990; Boulton, 1991; Moller, 1992), gender was found to be the category most strongly affecting student behaviors during the lunch time recess periods studied. Although this study does not attempt to draw a direct relationship between playground behaviors, teacher-supervisor role perspectives, and classroom pedagogy, it raises questions about play activities with respect to these relationships.

Review of Literature

Edward Tylor (1879) was the first anthropologist to identify the potential of play as a key to understanding culture (Cheska in Salter, Ed., 1977). Tylor came to realize that cultures borrowed traits through contact with each other. In his classic book, Anthropology (1881), Tylor proposed a theory of cultural evolution that was reflected by games. Tylor's study of the Aztec game of 'patolli' and the Indian game 'pachisi' concluded that the Mexican civilization was significantly influenced by Asian culture. Similarly, Hall's (1906) recapitulation theory proposed that children's play stages were reflections of the cultural stages in the development of cultures. Mead (1930) illustrated how culture influenced the personality of individuals in her studies of children from primitive societies. She sought to demonstrate that cultures have a basic pattern to them and that an individual or an entire society's actions can only be judged in relation to this pattern. This view became known as cultural relativism.

Huizinga in Homo Ludens (Playing Man) (1955) stated that, "Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadvertently defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing" (p.1). Huizinga drew a parallel between the nature and origin of religious concepts and play. In his view, a harmonious balance of play and "earnest", a word that he uses as a noun, are necessary for civilization to flourish. That balance, he proposed, is achieved by the use of suitable play forms as vehicles for and mediators of, the earnest. Huizinga regarded the forms of play espoused by the then contemporary Nazi regime as debased, adding a moral qualifier to the discussion of play. He summarized his conclusion in the statement that "...civilization arises and unfolds in and as play" (p.1). Huizinga's best known work, Homo Ludens, therefore, is an investigation of the extent to which culture expresses itself in forms of play.

Anthropological Definitions of Culture and Play

Keesing and Keesing (1971) broadly stated that culture encompasses all that humans learn, in contrast to what is genetically endowed. Anthropologists use the term "culture" to refer to all shared, learned patterns or, more narrowly, to refer only to shared meanings (Goodenough, 1971). Shared meanings are created, continued, changed, and transmitted through social interaction (Goodenough, 1971). Cultural anthropologists have not considered cognitive

processes as a major focus of their research (Jacob, 1987). They have, however, employed play behavior observations as frequently used research methodology tools.

The study of play is most often delineated by the psychoanalytic, the developmental, the ecological, and the socialization theories of play behavior (Levy, 1978). The socialization theory framework as described by Sutton-Smith (1968) is the approach taken by this paper because it makes the most direct connections between culture and play. Sutton-Smith views play as the exercise of voluntary social learning. Through play the child learns the motivation to control or master his or her environment in a safe and optimal level of anxiety. He postulated that there exists a strong relationship between the child-rearing practices of various cultures and the dominant games played by those societies. His premise, known as the conflict-enculturation theory, adds support to qualitative researchers who find value in observing play behaviors as they relate to culture.

Cross-cultural research by Roberts and Sutton-Smith (1962) included adults and children in different socioeconomic classes in the United States. Norbeck (cited in Lancy and Tindall, 1977) defines play as a "...conspicuously striking and universal kind of human behavior that is genetically based and culturally modified" (p.15). As a field of study more strongly committed than other fields to cross-cultural or comparative observation, anthropology, according to Norbeck, has an especially important role in the study of human play.

Recent Studies of Play

Current investigations explore a number of factors which affect cultural identity as observed in forms of play. Of all the variables studied, gender appears to have the greatest effect on playground behaviors. This finding often confirms people's general perceptions regarding boys and girls. It is important to note, however, the interaction between gender and other variables because of observed cumulative effects which are unexplained by gender differences alone.

Borman's study (1981) is the most comprehensive of those reviewed here. He reported on three related studies reflecting three perspectives on: (1) children's interpersonal relationships, (2) playground games, and (3) social cognitive skills. Subjects for each of the studies were children in the third and sixth grades at three elementary schools in Cincinnati during the 1979-1980 school year. The first study documents children's free play behavior during lunch recess. The second study explores relationships between and among social cognitive skills, intellectual functioning, age, gender and socioeconomic status. The third study pays particular attention to the physical setting of the playground in terms of equipment, time available for play, and supervision provided. Results reported collectively in these studies revealed several significant relationships between and among several of the categories listed. Gender and age were found to have the most striking effect based on an analysis of transcriptions of audio taped field notes recording children's spontaneous playground behavior.

Two studies include race and ethnicity in addition to gender as variables in their investigations. Of the two (Pinkett and Quay, 1987; Swadener, 1987), the Pinkett and Quay study (1987) has the greatest bearing on this paper because it warns against selecting one factor as the sole explanation for playground behaviors. Pinkett and Quay (1987) studied race and ethnicity by observing African-American and Caucasian pre-school students from middle socioeconomic income range families in a private school setting. The children were observed in terms of how they interacted socially with peers and engaged in cognitive play. Gender, but not race differences, were found on each level of social interaction with boys engaging more frequently than girls in the highest level of social interaction. No differences were noted as a result of the observations of cognitive play. The researchers concluded that their findings underscore the necessity of not treating African-American children as a monolithic group, but recognizing that gender, socioeconomic status, and possibly other variables influence social and cognitive behaviors in children. Swadener (1987) studied the classroom and playground social behaviors at two mainstreamed multi-cultural day care centers for one school year. Normally developing and developmentally delayed children were analyzed for their occurrence of interactions across gender, across race and ethnicity, and across developmental condition. Use of an ethnographic case study revealed increased acceptance of mainstream children by peers, as well as several patterns of gender segregated play. Interaction data showed gender to be used more than race and

ethnicity in playmate choices at both centers. More cross gender friendships were observed at the center with a gender balanced staff. The most gender segregated play at both centers was seen on the playground and during other gross motor play.

Other researchers discuss the relationship between gender and aggressivity by associating boys with more aggressive play. The two studies cited in this context tend to confirm people's general perceptions regarding the differences between boys' and girls' play. Lyons (1984) looked at gender differences within and across subsamples of boys and girls, comparing the playground behavior of peer-identified aggressive, withdrawn, aggressive-withdrawn, and contrast group children. Subjects were 117 students from grades four through six at two French-speaking elementary schools in Montreal, Canada. Group assignments were determined by scores on the Pupil Evaluation Inventory and each subject's playground behavior was videotaped. Tapes were scored by observers using a specially developed code focusing on several indicators including the gender of the peer with whom the interactions took place. Some expected sex differences were noted, particularly the higher incidence of aggressive behaviors demonstrated by boys in all groups. Boys were again reported to engage more frequently in both playful and aggressive fighting (Boulton, 1991). He conducted direct playground observations of two classes of eight year-olds and two classes of eleven year-olds in a public school in England. Students were observed as they engaged in

playful and aggressive fighting and the difference between the two behaviors was found to be strongly mediated by gender.

Gender-specific studies also add insight to playground behavior research. Both Fine (1986) and Humphreys and Smith (1987) selected populations reflecting only the male gender. By eliminating gender as a variable, they were able to highlight specific sub-types of behavior. Fine (1986) proposed that preadolescent boys regularly engage in forms of play that are rejected by adults. He described three kinds of "dirty play": aggressive pranks, sexual talk and racial slurs. Three years of ethnographic research with boys playing Little League baseball in New England and the upper Midwest led him to conclude that these play behaviors may meet developmental imperatives and that the players may still be considered to be "good children." Fine (1986) asserts that play need not affect a boy's character but may be situationally grounded. Humphreys and Smith (1987) observed playground behavior at an all boys school in England. They focused on play-fighting and chasing behaviors among seven, nine and eleven year-olds. They found that these behaviors occupied approximately ten percent of the time of the ninety-four students and that rough and tumble tended to occur in a friendly context. The playmate's strength became a significant factor as age increased.

Relationships between gender and psychosocial attributes are sometimes observed through expressive play behaviors. Downs and Reagan (1983) and Moller (1992) made this connection. Their

investigations are particularly important as one considers the social well-being of children in a school setting. Downs and Reagan (1983) investigated issues related to the development of preschool children's self-definitions of attractiveness. A sample of 140 subjects included equal numbers of male and female Caucasian students, three through six years of age, and their parents, teachers and peers. Self definitions of attractiveness were obtained by asking students to rate themselves. They were also asked to rate their own behaviors and were observed for positive and negative behaviors during free play. Parents and teachers also rated their behaviors and peers rated attractiveness. Results indicated that the students' self-judgements were more related to verbal reports of behavior than to observed behavior. Age and gender differences were found to influence the self-ratings as well as those made by peers, parents and teachers. Moller (1992) studied gender differences in play behavior and the relationship between sex-typed play and peer acceptance. Eighty-six second graders and eighty-one fourth graders were observed. Seventy-two males and seventy-five females demonstrated significant age and gender differences. Boys were found to be more boisterous and aggressive than girls.

The interaction between gender and the physical play environment should not be overlooked. For that reason, Phillips (1983) studied playground design and gender behavior. She cited literature supporting her premise that spontaneous segregation of the sexes will occur in play and that boys and girls will use play equipment in

qualitatively different ways. Phillips proposed that movement toward contemporary adventure playgrounds as opposed to traditional one-dimensional playgrounds with no natural landscaping can affect gender behavior and increase friendship formation. Pelligrini (1990) observed eighteen boys and seventeen girls in kindergarten, sixteen boys and fourteen girls in second grade, and fourteen boys and fifteen girls in fourth grade for eight months during their recess periods on a school playground. Data indicated that behavior varied by location on the playground and by gender. Boys and girls self-selected themselves into different environments to engage in preferred forms of play. Boys were discussed in terms of their propensity to active, outdoor play.

Like the play environment studies, Moore and Cooper (1984) consider an external variable, that it, supervisors. When playground behaviors were observed, gender differences were noted and the effect of supervisors on children's play was also found to be a significant factor. Moore and Cooper (1984) surveyed 162 teachers to examine the relations between teacher perceptions of discipline, teacher education, teacher experience, student social class, student ethnicity, and student grade level. They found that more experienced and educated teachers serving as playground supervisors preferred confronting students about misbehavior, while less educated teachers preferred physical or verbal punishments. The teachers' experience and educational levels were considered to be more significant factors

in teacher-student interactions than their perceptions of student social class, ethnicity or grade level.

Purpose

This study sought to better understand the influence that the gender, age, race and socioeconomic status may have on elementary school students' play behaviors in a multicultural setting. Because of the structure and schedule of the observation site's recess periods, gender and age were constants. That is, the children were grouped on the playground by gender and grade levels. Therefore, one goal of the study was to attempt to identify those play specific behaviors which could be observed within or among groups of children of the same sex or of similar age. Another goal was to attempt to identify those play specific behaviors which extended across the groupings of gender and age which were dependent upon race and socioeconomic status. If play is an exercise of voluntary social learning as Sutton-Smith (1968) contended, then the findings should be of significant interest to school site administrators and staff who wish to increase opportunities for social interaction among a diverse multicultural student body.

Method

The Observation Setting

Lunchtime recess observations were bounded by two important parameters: scheduling and designated play areas. School policy

provided for forty-five minutes per grade group for lunch and recess. The children had fifteen minutes to eat and then were dismissed to the playground where they had thirty minutes of recess. A new grade group was dismissed from the cafeteria to the playground every fifteen minutes. Care was taken when scheduling to make sure that only contiguous grades were on the playground at any one time. The first recess period began with the sixth graders at 11:30 a.m. and the last recess period ended with the first graders at 1:00 p.m. The school's lunch and recess schedule spanned a one hour and forty-five minute block of time. Therefore, a one hour observation allowed the researcher to take notes regarding the play behaviors of four age groups such as the sixth, fifth, fourth and third graders with two grade groups on the playground at any one time.

Another important feature of the observation setting was the designation of boys' and girls' play areas. On alternating weeks, the boys played on the blacktop and had use of the basketball courts and a side yard where one of three tetherballs were situated, while the girls had use of the large grassy field where they could use the jungle gym, engage in soccer or play on the two remaining tetherballs. On the weeks that the girls had use of the blacktop, they could be observed jumping rope in addition to playing basketball. These specific designated play areas allowed the researcher to readily observe within gender interactions with more clarity of focus than would have been possible had cross gender play been permitted.

Subjects

The sample population observed in this qualitative ethnography included 620 male and female public school students in grades one through six, ranging in age from six to twelve years old. Of the students observed, 79% were enrolled in the regular education program, whereas, 21% had been identified as special education students. The special education group could be further broken down into 18% academically gifted and talented and 3% mild/moderate mentally disabled. All special education students were mainstreamed with the larger student population for lunch and recess. Kindergarten students were not included in the study because of their separate play area. The racial/ethnic composition of the sample population consisted of 47% African-American, 35% Caucasian, 16% Asian and 3% Hispanic students. The subjects represented all strata of the socioeconomic scale even though 56% qualified for federally subsidized free or reduced lunch, indicating low family income.

Data Collection

Zelditch (1962) emphasized that in qualitative methodology, " . . . a field study is not a single method of gathering a single kind of information" (1962:566). Two types of method he identified were participant observation and informant interviewing. Participant observation provides information about incidents and histories. Through informant interviewing, one can learn about institutionalized

norms and statuses. Observation and interviewing techniques, according to Zelditch (1962), yield complementary rather than comparable data. Likewise, in this study data was collected through two techniques, the researcher's playground observations and teacher-supervisor interviews. The researcher, who was the principal at the school site, observed the sample population engaging in informal lunchtime play on the school playground on four occasions. The researcher took handwritten notes of her observations which totaled twelve legal pad pages. Four observations took place over a period of two months and were approximately one hour each in duration.

The researcher considered making observations from a classroom window looking out on the playground so as not to physically affect the observation setting by her presence. Spradley advised that, "Rather than seeking to eliminate all obtrusiveness and concealing yourself completely, it is probably best to weigh carefully the extent to which a social situation will call attention to your activities" (1980:48). The researcher decided to go out to the playground and take notes there and assume the role of the passive participant-observer. Sometimes she sat on a wooden bench near a tree and , at other times, circulated among the children. The close proximity of the researcher and the subjects sometimes resulted in verbal interactions. Since the subjects were accustomed to seeing their principal on the playground anyway, the social situation was not considered to be prohibitive. An overriding strength of being

physically present on the playground was that it allowed the researcher to obtain a more mobile, intimate vantage point from which student interactions could be seen and heard. Interviewing Procedures

Four playground duty teachers were interviewed by the researcher. Each teacher-supervisor was interviewed in April of 1992. A second series of more focused follow-up interviews was conducted in June of 1992. The four interviewees selected were key informants as to student playground behaviors. Two of the informants, Michael Downs and Elizabeth Freed, were physical education teachers who had opportunities to observe children at play that far exceeded the classroom teachers. Both were relatively young, ages twenty-six and thirty-four, respectively. Downs was chosen because this was his first year at the school and it was hoped that his perceptions would retain a view of "coming from the outside" of the school environment. Downs was also the only full-time male teacher on the faculty. Freed had the benefit of teaching physical education for approximately ten years at the school and could contrast past playground behaviors with those observed. She was the resident authority on playground equipment and was customarily deferred to in discussions of the selection, adequacy and safety of new equipment.

Jane Newberg and Sandra Zeller were the remaining two key informants interviewed. Newberg was chosen because of her leadership role at the school and her articulate mode of expression. Both Newberg and Zeller were employed as teachers of the academically

gifted. Zeller added the perspective of the only African-American observer to be interviewed and one that had worked at the school since shortly after its founding twenty years ago. In all four cases, the informants were chosen because of the researcher's informal evaluation of their ability to abstract and process information.

The interview protocol consisted of questions asked by the researcher which stemmed from her observations and a review of the literature. As Frake (1964) pointed out, "A description of culture, and ethnography, is produced from an ethnographic record of the events of a society within a given period of time, the events of a society including, of course, informants' responses to the ethnographer, his queries, tests and apparatus" (111). The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight to the child's world of play from the teachers' perspectives. The researcher also sought to test some of the assumptions derived from her own playground observations. Both series of interviews were audio-taped, the first session yielding a total of sixty-two single-spaced typed transcribed pages. The second series of interviews yielded twenty-six pages. At no time were the eight interviews so structured that the teacher-supervisors were discouraged from departing from the questions asked. Elaborations and divergences were commonplace and encouraged by the researcher. Initially, the teacher-supervisors appeared to be uneasy at the prospect of being interviewed by their principal. They seemed to find comfort in having a set of questions before them. As the interviews progressed, the

teacher-supervisors felt more at ease and began to enjoy responding to the largely open-ended questions.

The first series of interviews focused on nine questions which the researcher developed based on her observations and a review of literature. Questions one to three were designed to elicit demographic information on the teacher-supervisors including personal and educational background, professional experience and position at the school. The fourth question asked for a self-report of the interviewees playground duty responsibilities. The fifth question prompted interviewees to provide an operational definition of their role as playground teacher-supervisor. The sixth and seventh questions investigated gender, age, race and socioeconomic variables of the children observed and their possible expression when considered in terms of type of play and the location of play. The eighth question probed deeper into the relationship, if any, between location and type of play and socioeconomic status and the final question elicited more personal conclusions regarding all the questions asked. The second series of follow-up interviews consisted of eleven questions based upon information gained from prior interviews. Increased clarity was sought regarding the interviewees' references to corresponding issues of the physical play environment, multiculturalism, safety and supervision problems.

Results

As explained in the Methods Section of this study, the subjects were grouped on the playground in terms of similar age and same gender. The variables of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status were interspersed within and across this context. The goal of the observations and the interviews was to learn more about the child's world of play in a multicultural setting. Specific research questions emerged from the researcher's observations and a review of the literature which asked: 1) if gender and age variables had play-specific behaviors; 2) if race and socioeconomic status variables have play-specific behaviors under the conditions of age and gender separation; 3) and finally, if within-race differences and across race differences could be further delineated by age, gender and socioeconomic status. The results of this study are reported in view of their value in answering these research questions through the eyes of the observer and the interviewees.

The interviewees all stated that safety and the prevention of accidents on the playground was their primary responsibility as teacher-supervisors. Wide variations existed, however, in how the teachers attempted to fulfill their responsibilities. The interviewees revealed that views their differed as to what optimal supervision techniques were. Newberg, for example, stressed that when on playground duty, she made a point of circulating among the children and not stopping to chat with "hangers on". Zeller saw playground

duty as an opportunity to have individual conversations with children and help them solve their social and emotional problems. In contrast, the researcher noted in her observations that teachers often did not see behaviors that could result in playground injuries, such as pushing and pulling the heavy metal restroom doors and hanging from tree limbs. Teachers, she observed, were often late in meeting their lines of students when each recess period ended. This resulted in disorder and minor mishaps. Thus, while safety was the stated objective of the playground supervisors, in practice, other behaviors, ranging from non-observance to social interactions were as evident.

Of all the variables mentioned as affecting student play behaviors, gender proved to be the easiest to observe and the most frequently discussed by the interviewees. When asked about gender-specific play behaviors, Downs stated that girls were more passive than boys. Zeller similarly stated that girls were more manageable than boys. She described boys as "romping and playing harder". Newberg reported that boys like "big play": that is, they play in disorganized groups and seek out horizontal, open space. Newberg maintained that girls mill around, mingle and visit. She observed that the girls like to jump rope, engage in vertical up and down activities, and interact socially. She described boys as more aggressive, preferring expansive lateral movements which allow them to more fully use their gross motor muscles. Freed remarked that boys more frequently engage in rough and tumble play. None of the comments

made by the teacher-supervisors were without precedent in the field notes taken by the researcher or in the review of literature, except for Newberg's postulate regarding lateral and vertical gender movement preferences. In that way, Newberg offered a unique view of gender-specific behaviors in the child's world of play. The researcher's observations were consistent with the teacher-supervisors' observations, but she also noted that boys were more frequently reprimanded for engaging in expansive play.

Age was identified as having an effect on play behaviors that was almost as observable as gender. Downs emphatically stated that older boys tended to push away younger boys and even hurt them if they attempted to enter a game where older boys predominated. Girls, according to Downs, willingly included younger girls in their games. Young boys appeared to be less organized and less "democratic" when they played together than the older boys. Freed agreed that the younger students were less organized and stated that there was more leader behavior among the older boys who preferred organized sports. Problems arose among the older boys when team members did not follow game rules. Newberg did not provide much information about age and how it affects play behaviors because, unlike the physical education teachers, her recess duty time was shorter and did not extend across a wide range of age groups. Zeller also had limited opportunities to observe differing age groups but did concur with Downs and Freed that older children played more complex games. The researcher, who

observed all age groups at play, noted that younger children, particularly girls, had the greatest desire to be in close proximity to the playground supervisor and sought out frequent verbal interactions. Past and present experience of the researcher confirmed her observation that third, fourth and fifth grade boys were the most likely to be reprimanded for rough play. She also noted that younger boys could be observed playing hopscotch and jumprope, games that were generally relegated to girls as the boys became older.

The researcher observed that the Asian students were clearly the most visible group to display racial/ethnic exclusivity in terms of play behaviors. She found the Hispanic group to be the most difficult to observe in isolation because they were the most likely to interact with all races represented on the playground. Downs likewise observed that the Asian students played together with more exclusivity than the other groups. He proposed that the larger the play area, the greater the chances were of observing children of different races together at play. He used the large, grassy soccer field as an example and viewed this setting as the most likely to promote interracial play. The researcher observed Asian girls playing a culturally exclusive game and noted that Asian children, when conversing with each other on the playground, spoke only Vietnamese. Freed agreed that the Asian students tended to stay together more on the playground. She cited the Asian girls' fondness for a game they called "Chinese jumprope" where the jumprope was uniquely designed using colored rubber bands.

Non-Asian girls were never permitted to join in this particular game, even when they asked to do so. Freed stated that unlike the other groups on the playground, Asian girls were more aggressive than their male counterparts. This was a perspective unsubstantiated by any of the other data collected. Freed viewed African-Americans and Caucasians as playing the same games, often together. African-American boys, she noted, were more likely to try to change game rules and argue over procedures than were the other groups. Newberg agreed that Asian students tended to "keep to themselves", and when non-Asians attempted to join their games, they were rejected. Newberg saw the Asian students as playing together harmoniously and seldom complaining to playground supervisors about each other. She added that mixed race games were seldom balanced and usually one race was in the greatest number. African-American boys, for example, would play basketball with a limited number of others and the entry of others was predicated by known physiological skill levels of proficiency. Zeller, the African-American teacher-supervisor, denied that race had any affect upon playground behaviors at the school.

Socioeconomic variables were the most difficult to isolate in the playground setting and were not readily observed by the researcher or the teacher-supervisors. Downs observed, however, that lower socioeconomic boys were more leader-based in their play behaviors while Freed noted no socioeconomic differences. Newberg did not recognize the existence of a "true underclass" socioeconomically at the school. Zeller noted that the gifted population at the school

came from a predominantly middle class background and that she has noticed that these students have a hard time relating to others. This was the only reference made by the teacher-supervisors regarding special education students. The researcher, however, did observe both the gifted resource students and the mentally disabled students displaying group exclusivity on the playground.

Discussion

Gender-Age

Gender differences were supported in this study as being the most strongly documented variable affecting the play behaviors of children. The age variable was second in significance. The two variables were frequently included in the review of literature and served as a backdrop for the analysis of other multicultural variables, such as race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The fact that the observation setting at the school was gender segregated did not, in the opinion of the researcher, detract from the significance of the study, but rather added to the literature of gender segregated play cited in the review of the literature (Fine, 1986; Humphreys and Smith, 1987). Of particular significance was the Newberg 'sighting' of vertical play in girls and lateral play in boys.

Age as a variable is strongly supported by the literature. From the interviews with the two physical education teachers and from the researcher's observations, age, here to, was a significant variable.

Part of the reason must be attributed to the fact that these persons had opportunities to observe the children for longer periods of time and were exposed to a wider range of age groups. The other teacher-supervisors did not freely compare age groups in their interviews and did not include age differences in their "world view".

When the two variables of gender and age were viewed concurrently, the findings indicated that both young boys and girls engaged in a wide range of play activities. As girls got older, their range of activities, however, seemed to remain constant, while for boys, as they aged, their activities narrowed, seemingly because of their interest in organized games and sporting events. Consistent in both genders was that with increased age, came an increase in the organization and the complexity of the play activities.

Race and Ethnicity

The researcher initiated the study in order to better understand multiculturalism in a realistic school setting of a diverse student body. Even though the race/ethnicity variable was of particular interest to the researcher, it was found to be less significant than gender and age. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees, except Zeller, noted the race/ethnicity variable both within and across gender and age delimitations. Specifically, Asians were cited as displaying the greatest within-group exclusivity, and even aggressiveness, while Hispanics, the least. Downs noted that large, open spaces and physiological skill levels could break down racial barriers to

integrated play. This insight, from the perspective of a physical education teacher, is worthy of further playground investigation.

Lastly, the researcher's observations noted a behavior not mentioned by the other adult supervisors, that is, the Asian students' exclusive use of the Vietnamese language during play. Clearly, this should be viewed as adding to the groups' exclusivity. The only other non-English speaking group on the playground were Hispanic students who spoke English to others and to each other.

SES and Program Identity

The search for socioeconomic variables was the least observable factor. Observations made by the researcher did identify a different category of grouping loosely bounded by socioeconomic status, that is, 'program identity'. She observed separate groupings of special education students which included gifted resource children and children in the mild/moderate mentally disabled classes. The gifted resource students came primarily from the upper middle class and the mentally disabled class was comprised of all strata of society. They had in common a programmatic identity and were observed playing in semi-exclusive groups that transcended race. For the most part, gifted students tended to either be sitting in a circle talking or standing up and talking. In contrast, mild/moderate boys tended to engage in run and chase games over a longer age span, perhaps reflecting a developmental lag time; while mild/moderate girls were

observed skipping and holding hands, rather than talking in one place. What these observations may suggest is that a child's cognitive development is evident on the playground. Although only one study reviewed in the literature referred to the issue of mainstreaming in a multicultural setting (Swadener, 1987), there may need to be more studies which combine anthropological descriptions of expressive play (Sutton-Smith, 1968) with psychological notions of development (Piaget, 1962).

Implications

Jacob's (1987) review of qualitative research makes the point that the school of thought known as symbolic interactionalism espouses the idea that the individual and society must be viewed as inseparable units. This paper makes the same point with respect to schools and student bodies. That is, neither should be viewed as separate and apart from society.

This study of an urban elementary school playground found that gender, age, race and socioeconomic status do have an effect on playground behaviors in a multicultural setting. Gender was most easily supported as a factor influencing behavior within and between groups of students. Socioeconomic status was the least supported variable. Further study is needed to explore some of the serendipitous findings of the investigation, in particular, how the physical environment of the playground could be manipulated to break

down group boundaries and how the use of second languages affects the social integration of children. Another avenue for further study suggests that mainstreamed special education students on an elementary playground may not be as integrated with the larger student population as many educators want to believe.

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